

USACHPPM Technical Guide 240

Combat Stress Behaviors

War is more stressful than any training can be. The goal of the enemy is to stress and confuse you. Security and support operations can also involve heavy stress, even if there is no combat. Mental and physical fitness will help you endure the stress of combat and military operations. Know the signs of stress, what to do for self and others, and when to seek help.



Control Your Stress

- Try to look calm and in control.
- Focus on the mission.
- Follow SOPs.
- Focus on success.
- Breathe deeply and relax.
- Know battle fatigue/combat stress reaction is normal.
- Keep open communication with your team.
- Gather facts.
- Avoid rumors.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Eat well-balanced meals.
- Maintain personal hygiene.
- Practice quick relaxation techniques.
- Sleep at least 4 hours a night in each 24-hour period, 6-8 hours if possible.
- Debrief after unusually stressful events.
- Share grief with a friend, a leader, or a chaplain.
- Keep active.
- Welcome new team members.
- Stay physically fit.
- Know and practice self-aid/buddy-aid.
- Support each other.
- Set the example of an ethical, moral soldier

Adaptive (Positive) Combat Behaviors

- Unit cohesion
- Loyalty to buddies
- Loyalty to leaders
- Identification with unit tradition
- Sense of eliteness
- Sense of mission
- Alertness
- Strength
- Endurance
- Tolerance to hardship, discomfort, pain, injury
- Sense of purpose
- Increased faith, confidence
- Heroic acts
- Courage

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Combat Misconduct and Criminal Acts

(Unacceptable Reactions to Combat Stress)

- Mutilating enemy dead
- Not taking prisoners
- Killing enemy prisoners
- Killing noncombatants
- Torture
- Brutality
- Killing animals
- Fighting with allies
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Recklessness, indiscipline
- Looting, pillaging, committing rape
- Fraternalization
- Excessive sick call
- Negligent disease, injury
- Shirking, malingering
- Combat refusal
- Self-inflicted wounds
- Threatening/killing own leaders
- AWOL
- Desertion

*Stress cannot justify criminal acts. You and your leaders must **prevent** or **report** them!

Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction

- Hyperalertness
- Fear, anxiety, trembling
- Irritability, anger, rage
- Grief, self-doubt, guilt
- Physical stress complaints
- Inattention, carelessness
- Loss of confidence
- Loss of hope and faith
- Depression, insomnia
- Impaired duty performance
- Erratic actions
- Outbursts
- Freezing under fire, immobility
- Terror, panic running under fire
- Total exhaustion, apathy
- Loss of skills and memory
- Impaired speech or muteness
- Impaired vision, touch, hearing
- Weakness and paralysis
- Hallucinations, delusions

Recovery

- Keep command informed.
- No one is immune from developing battle fatigue/combat stress reaction.
- Battle fatigue/combat stress reaction quickly improves with rest, reassurance, good food and water, sleep, hygiene, and productive work.
- If the situation is unsafe, temporarily transfer the soldier to a safer area within or outside the unit.
- If the symptoms could be due to physical injury or illness, have a medic or aid station personnel examine the soldier.
- Welcome recovered soldiers back and expect them to pull their fair share.
- Having one combat stress reaction does not mean you are more likely to have another.

